



MISSISSIPPI
STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Communications & Public Relations

570 East Woodrow Wilson
Post Office Box 1700
Jackson, Mississippi
39215-1700

F. E. Thompson, Jr., MD, MPH
State Health Officer

601/576-7667
601/576-7517 FAX
www.msdh.state.ms.us

Equal Opportunity In Employment/Services

NEWS Release

Topic:: Health Department Warns Residents
To Avoid, Prevent Mosquito-Borne Diseases
Contact: Kelly Shannon or NKS Wessman
Date: August 3, 2001

With evidence of two different mosquito-borne diseases affecting both humans and horses in Mississippi, State Health Officer Dr. Ed Thompson urges all Mississippians to avoid mosquito bites.

The warning comes on the identification of probable Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in at least three horses in George County. Ten cases of EEE in horses have been confirmed in Alabama, at least one close to the Mississippi border, and one case of EEE confirmed in a horse in Bienville Parish, Louisiana. Eastern Equine Encephalitis can also affect humans; so far, no human case of EEE has been identified in the state.

"Mosquitoes can be anywhere and everywhere, especially at this time of year and with the environmental conditions we have now," Dr. Thompson said. "Historically in Mississippi, EEE cases normally occur in late July into the early fall."

Eastern Equine Encephalitis is a viral disease of birds, which is sometimes transmitted to both horses and humans by certain species of mosquitoes. EEE generally affects rural areas more than towns and cities.

The disease is not directly transmitted from person to person, but mosquitoes remain infective for life. EEE in humans can range from a mild flu-like illness with headache and high fever to disorientation, tremors, occasional convulsion, coma, and death..

"The species of mosquitoes that carries EEE breeds in swamp and marshy areas. Human-to-human and horse-to-human transmission apparently does not occur," said Dr. Thompson.

"Eastern Equine Encephalitis can produce severe illness in humans and can even be fatal," he added. "We have no effective treatment. Prevention is all we have."

The first confirmed human case of mosquito-borne disease in Mississippi this year was identified as LaCrosse (LAC) encephalitis in a seven-year-old child from rural south Marion County and the second in another child from rural Noxubee County.

Confirmatory testing at the State Department of Health's laboratory in Jackson and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Fort Collins, Colorado, identified the illness as LaCrosse (LAC) encephalitis. Both children are recovering.

A third child from the George County area is suspect for LAC encephalitis; CDC is testing for confirmation. Most cases of LAC encephalitis occur in children less than 16 years of age.

Like EEE, LAC encephalitis is a virus transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. LaCrosse encephalitis is caused by a different virus from EEE, and a different species of mosquitoes transmits it. All mosquitoes are not infected. Most people who get the virus have no symptom or sign of illness. An individual with LAC encephalitis might have fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, or drowsiness. Illness in young children can lead to seizures, coma, and paralysis

LAC encephalitis generally affects rural areas more than towns or cities. The normal cycle of the virus that causes LAC encephalitis occurs between mosquitoes and small mammals, but under certain conditions the virus can be transmitted to humans by certain species of mosquitoes. Person-to-person transmission does not occur.

The State Department of Health suggests several measures for Mississippians to avoid mosquito bites:

- < Avoid mosquito-prone areas, especially at dawn and dusk, when the mosquitoes are most active
- < Wear protective clothing, such as long sleeves and long pants, when going into mosquito-prone areas
- < Use insect repellent on exposed body parts (use only according to label directions)
- < Get rid of any open containers of water around the house such as old tires and paint cans where mosquitoes can breed
- < Keep the grass mowed, as this decreases the available habitat for mosquitoes.

